



Sammy and Rosie: Exploring sexual identities

FILM

Sammy And Rosie

Hanif Kureishi's new film, *Sammy And Rosie Get Laid*, has just been released. **Pratibha Parmar** assesses his portrayal of Asian life

With the release of *Sammy And Rosie Get Laid*, Hanif Kureishi, its writer, is undoubtedly going to find him-

ceived acclaim from both the press and the public but it also provoked many bitter feelings and arguments, especially within the Asian community. How could he do this to us? Portray us as deviant homosexuals, grasping capitalists, dirty old men who drink and laze about in bed with uncut toe nails and our young women as bare-breasted nymphomaniacs? Why not redress the negative images of us spawned over centuries, asked many black critics while white liberals congratulated the film for its sophisticated chic.

There is no escaping the fact that few Asian writers or filmmakers have the opportunity to get their work produced and distributed as commercially and internationally as Kureishi has done. Such success has also meant that the expectations many people have of Kureishi are often unrealistically enor-

mous.

At the risk of being accused of being divisive and heretical, Kureishi has rightly refused to take on the burden of being a speaker for his race and community. Mercifully, he doesn't deal with the language of positive or negative stereotypes. He moves beyond, to explore the multiplicity of identities that people, some of them black, inhabit.

His characters refuse a singular categorisation of themselves bound by a static sense of ethnicity. He is acutely aware that we live in a time of upheaval, a period when there are historic shifts in political identification. His characters point to the shifting balances between race and class interests. The explicit portrayal of desire and sexual pleasure feature high on his agenda as he explores the fluidity of people's sexual identities.

To cover such a complex and mine-ridden terrain is no easy task and to avoid the dangers of clumsy rhetoric and the reduction of intricate characters and issues to caricature and trivialisation needs much patience and

vigilance, not only from the writer but also the director. I fear that, in haste to produce a quick seconder to *Lauderette*, not enough care has gone into specifying the subtleties within the broad canvas that *Sammy and Rosie* attempts to paint.

The scenario is as before: Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s, racism, police violence and sexual freedom. Despite its eclecticism, which is no bad thing in itself, the characters are unevenly developed, jostling for space. While the intention to have an Asian lesbian or a young Afro-Caribbean 'rebel' is indeed politically worthy, it ends up by merely providing sexual spice and titillation.

This film raises many questions. How to judge the success of such films when it is the raw emotions and experiences of 'powerless' groups that shape their commercial success? Does the commercialisation of black experiences do anything to change it? And while we should be thankful that such films highlight and put British blacks on the international map, is this enough in itself?



Hanif Kureishi: No stereotypes

self yet again amidst much controversy and passionate debate.

My Beautiful Launderette, his first screenplay, re-